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ONE MAN'S TALE

by

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I've seen death many times. I've cradled a comrade in my arms as shrapnel hissed around us. I've seen a young marine fall to his death during training, none of which even crossed my mind as I walked along Renshaw Street in Liverpool on that wartime winter's day. It was January 1942, I hadn't the faintest idea what to do with my teenage life; school days were nearly over and there was a war on, it just did not seem right to opt for university when everyone my age was being conscripted into the armed forces. I had just turned 17; my turn would come soon, so why wait to be conscripted and sent to a service I would certainly not have chosen, or worse, sent down the mines as a Bevan boy. Why not volunteer and have perhaps a choice? I could go to University after we had won the war. I was tall and I suppose "gangly" would describe me. I turned into the nearby recruiting office and enquired about becoming a Fleet Air Arm pilot as at school I HAD OPTED FOR THE AIR Cadets rather than the army side. It was the naval uniform and the glamour that attracted me. Why did I not see the darker side? . However the navy did not require pilots at that time. As I turned to leave, a resplendent Royal Marine sergeant said, "You look a likely young fellow out for adventure, in fact a budding Royal Marine ". Obviously, I knew of the marines, but I did not see myself as one, in fact it had never entered my mind. I had been told to keep clear of the marines since you would probably get a medal but more likely a hole in the ground, The popular opinion was that if you had a modicum of common sense you should obey the golden service rule, widely quoted but never obeyed ---- " never volunteer for anything". The sergeant seemed pretty confident however and, without realising it I had enlisted as an H.O. (Hostilities Only) marine . So much for the golden rule. The war needed huge numbers of men over and above what could be provided by the reserves and territorial s. The shortfall was made good by H.O's -civilians conscripted or by volunteers enlisted for the duration. They included young men, some enthusiastic and some reluctant. The war could not have been fought and won without them. He congratulated me on joining "the elite". He never mentioned the sweat, toil and tears involved. Not that it would have made any difference; I was now well and truly committed and had signed the appropriate papers. There was no going back; I was in for the duration. After a medical, albeit embarrassing, I was pronounced A1 fit and soon after received a travel warrant and joining instructions for a place called Lypstone near Exmouth in Devon. was a "Y" entrant, which, if I proved suitable, gave me the opportunity to try for a commission. Obviously by now I hoped to become an

officer in this elite regiment. I arrived at a military camp comprising single storey huts some of brick and some of wooden construction. I was a new recruit to the Royal Marines Infantry Training Centre, (RMITC). It was here for the next 8 weeks I was to receive basic training comprising ironing clothes, potato peeling, table scrubbing, floor polishing, kitting out, inoculations, square bashing and arms drill...then on to Dalditch where I hoped to learn how to be a real marine. On Woodbury Common I did field training and learned about the rifle and the Bren gun along with actually firing them and more physical training. There had been a lot of drilling involved at Lympstone. Our instructor was a King's Badge man, gained by being the best all round recruit of his intake, as well as being a regular. He taught me to march, slope and present arms and generally to behave and look like a real marine. I emerged from Lympstone full of confidence and ready for the next stage of my training. This as you already know took place at Dalditch where we had field training, camouflage and qualifying on the rifle and the Bren light machine gun, which took place on the ranges where we fired live rounds at canvas targets 300 yards away. We also practised bayonet training making drill moves as laid down in some manual or other, until eventually at the end of each session there was an exhilarating time when we charged and savaged straw dummies with fixed bayonets and rifle butts releasing a joyous and uninhibited ferocity. There were inevitable route marches and as we marched along the country lanes we sang all kinds of songs including bawdy ones. In spite of ourselves, as the days passed, we became and looked like marines. With polished boots, well pressed trousers, ironed creases in the back of the battle dress blouses we developed a definite swagger and a touch of arrogance. We almost forgot about the war.

Today Lympstone is the Commando training centre where probably the hardest regime in the world turned fledgling marines into commandos. In my day it produced infantry for the Mobile Naval Defence Organisation. The battalions of the MNDO eventually (1943), turned over to Commandos, the very fit going to the Commando battle school at Achnacarry in Scotland and the rest to become landing craft crews. Way back in 1940 after Dunkirk, Winston Churchill decided that we needed to establish an elite military force to harass the enemy whilst we recovered after the evacuation from France at Dunkirk. So the Commandos were formed, consisting entirely of volunteers from all

branches of the British army.

Later the Marines turned over to commandos. The battalions of MNBDO were turned over to Commandos as follows:

1 RM to	42 CDO.
2 RM to	43 CDO.
3 RM to	44 CDO.
5 RM to	45 CDO.
9 RM to	46 CDO
10 RMto	47 CDO.

Some time later the 7th battalion became 48 COD. 40 and 41 EM CD's were already in existence. I was just completing my training at this time. Then a little doubt entered my mind. Should I have stayed on at school and gone on to university?. My father had been in the Royal Engineers in the First World War and my parents were anxious for me to go to university. I did well at school and was reasonably certain of a place at university but there was a war on and the school old boys were all in action winning medals and having an exciting time. So doubts vanished and it was war and the marines for me. I arrived at Lympstone and was given a large sheet of brown paper and some string in order to send away my civilian clothes. All I had at this point was a pair of denim fatigues. Later I received the rest of my kit along with meticulous instructions on how to care for it and lay it out for inspections, which were required regularly. I eventually produced a semblance of a parcel, which hopefully might be accepted by the postal service and set off to find the camp post office. A smartly turned out marine was marching by, arms coming up high, so I ambled up to him in my civilian way and casually enquired the way to the post office. This splendid creature looked me up and down, turned I think a shade of purple, and bellowed, "Stand to attention and address me as Colour Sergeant". Only then did I notice three stripes and a crown on his sleeve, but did not realise their significance. As the days went by I learned to revere them and perhaps initially to fear the wearers of them. Nevertheless I quickly came to my idea of attention, which obviously did not pass muster with him for, with a disdainful grimace, he turned on his heel and marched away. I sauntered out onto the wide expanse of tarmac facing me,

only to come to an abrupt stop by a roar of "Halt that man, come here." I assumed he meant me, as there was nobody else in the vicinity. He told me that nobody walked on the parade ground. They marched, and inferior beings like me "doubled" For my information that meant a trot, "Now get going at the double," left right left right". I obeyed without ascertaining the whereabouts of this elusive post office. I dare not ask anyone for directions in case they turned out to be a General or something. I wasn't sure who had the highest rank, my friend or a General. Eventually I found my way to the camp post office and joined a queue of "rookies" like myself waiting with their parcels. On reflection mine didn't look so bad after all.

Over the next few days I received several injections, one of which made my arm very sore but gained no sympathy from the TCO's who seemed determined to make my life a misery, particularly when learning to slope arms, an exercise devised I'm sure to wreak the maximum pain in inoculated human arms. As time passed I came to realise just how able these instructors were and how I was developing under their tuition. Already I felt pride in being a fledgling marine. I spent hours "bulling" my boots with a toothbrush handle and spit and black boot polish until I could see my face in them. Even so they never achieved the standard of my instructors boots. I still remember some of the sayings of the physical training instructors to this day, "No gain without pain" and "pain is weakness leaving the body ". I Volunteered for everything at first in the mistaken belief that it would help my chances of getting to officer cadet training unit until I realised I only succeeded in getting jobs nobody else wanted, and dirty ones at that. Someone told me that a volunteer was someone who didn't understand the question in the first place. I stopped volunteering. One thing I couldn't dodge was guard duty, this involved spells of sentry duty in four-hour stints, worse during the night hours. Afterwards we rested fully clothed and equipped in the guardroom, a place of comradeship, warm and smoky and with a never-ending supply of cocoa, I was an HO. (Hostilities Only) Marine and by definition very inferior to the "regulars". Later we H. O's proved our worth in action against the enemy, after all we made up the bulk of the wartime forces and we did win after all. Even as H. O's we were beginning to realise that we had been adopted by the Corps and had in some mysterious way acquired deep self respect and a new identity as part of a family who welcomed us into its exclusive circle.

Arms drill, square bashing, bayonet fighting, PT. and field craft followed along with further instruction on German weapons / About this time I was introduced to "milling" Two teams faced each other with opponents approximately of similar size. The first pair came out fighting and this went on for one or two minutes after which they were replaced by the next pair and so on. Milling involves standing toe-to-toe and slugging away. Defence is not part of the game, attack is. Many finish up bleeding and it's all part of the mill. Milling, even though boxing gloves are worn has its origin in the old bare knuckle prizefights. In milling if one drew serious blood the next pair replaced them earlier, and so on down the line. I soon reached a\_ working arrangement with my partner; we both had noses, which bled easily. Thereafter milling became a doddle. Milling was a regular feature of marine and Para training and only these units do it. All other units box properly to amateur rules and with a referee. Further training in tactics et, continued until we were ready for Achnacarry. The training was hard and gave meaning to the mantra that was repeated by everyone over and over again, "train hard, fight easy. Train easy, fight hard and die." The route to the award of the green beret is hard and long and designed to weed out the unfit and the unsuitable. It is both a physical and a mental test. You have to show determination and courage, and then you'll be oak. You are aiming to become one of the best of the best. The first commandos were all army volunteers. They trained at the battle school in Scotland at Achnacarry, near Sean Bridge where there is a memorial to those who went off to war from there. Achnacarry -was the commando basic training centre for WW11 and trained 25000 commandos of various nationalities between 1942 and 1945. The initial RIM. Commando was formed February 1942 and became 40 EM COD and was followed eventually by the rest. We marines went through the hardest training imaginable, worse than active service. Yet it made boys into men and men into the finest assault troops of any army. The rock faces in the area were used for rock climbing and abseiling. By the river were a fearsome rope slide and an overhead Tarzan course in the trees. We were forced to swim in cold lochs, go on speed marches, usually up hills, and undergo long marches in full kit. Go on cross-country runs and do regular PT. and learn unarmed combat and how to kill with the Fairburn Sykes dagger. All these tested our endurance to the limit. If you failed to make the grade you were off the course and R.T.U'd (Returned to unit). This meant Landing craft or some other obscure Marine unit / We enjoyed temporary respites

to view training films as we progressed towards the award of the Green Beret. The training did not recognise rank; everyone, officer, NCO and marines all underwent identical training without any privileges for anyone. I recall a large fir tree dominating part of the camp and of course the inevitable parade ground. At the entrance to Achnacarry there were a series of graves warning newcomers what could happen with live ammunition training if you became careless. The need to always be on the alert became ingrained in us and saved many lives later in Normandy. It was only after the war that I discovered the graves were in fact empty. The next move was posting as a unit, where we trained to operate as a team. There existed in the unit a true spirit of comradeship fostered by the emphasis on teaching recruits the history of the Marines from their origins in 1664 to the present day, so producing that pride in belonging, known as esprit de corps. We were a family, and in fact there were many fathers and brothers and other relations in the Corps, some marine's regulars could cite grandfathers and great grandfathers who had served before them as marines. This in large measure enabled us to live up to the saying 'when the going gets tough, the tough get going'. After this phase of our training amid the bleakness of Scotland we were completely hardened all-round marines. One special activity that lasted throughout all active service and was encouraged in training was 'the buddy system'. This involved partnering with a pal and undergoing all the hardships and trials together, helping and encouraging each other, and in so doing also encouraging every one else. It was a great help on assault courses to have a buddy and even more so in action, as we looked out for, and looked after, one another. I recall how on hazardous speed marches I looked at my buddy who seemed to be capable of going on forever so I kept going. At the end of the march he told me that he had kept going because I was still marching along as if I could go on for ever. That was the buddy system at work. I forgot to mention apropos Lymington to tell you about the Salvation Army canteen in Exmouth where, for a small payment and handing over your beret, you could dine on fish, chips and peas with a mug of tea. When finished you handed in your knife and fork and duly recovered your beret. Experience had taught the canteen ladies that a marine dared not go back to camp without his headgear.

I cannot praise too highly the work that the Sally Army did for the troops throughout the

war. I will always remember them turning up with their welcome char in the most unexpected and often dangerous places. I for one will always donate to their funds. They did so much for soldiers' morale during the war. From June 1940 Western Europe was entirely under German domination. In order to win the war it was known that we had to land in Europe and overcome German resistance; the operation to achieve this was known codenamed Overlord. It eventually took place on June the 6th 1944.D Day. It was 4 years in the planning under British General Morgan, but it was in 1943 that planning began in detail for a landing in France. Earlier Dieppe had demonstrated the need for a landing in sufficient strength to establish a strong bridgehead before the enemy could react and build up his forces. This meticulous planning based on the lessons from Dieppe and from clandestine raids on the French coast proved that reconnaissance is never wasted and is ingrained in every subalterns and NCO's mind. Nowadays even in business and selling the catch phrase, " Proper prior planning prevents piss poor performance", is true and useful. It is even known as the 7 P's. By this time there were strains of separation and uncertainty - uncertainty of what was happening at home and what was to happen next to me. There was little news and little leave. The farewells after a leave did impose a strain on one. I definitely think that this initial service and subsequent activities affected my later life. However before any invasion could take place it was necessary: - To deceive the enemy as to date and location of landings so as to ensure a rapid build up of men and supplies ready for a break out once a landing had been secured. To achieve these we had to:

- Attain air superiority and provide adequate naval and aerial bombardment to suppress enemy fire before and after the assault phase.
- It is also essential to secure a port as quickly as possible, certainly within the initial few days. It was considered unlikely that a large port such as Cherbourg would be left useable by the enemy even if it could be captured on day one.
- The solution was the Mulberry harbours. These were huge hollow blocks of concrete called caissons, (some measuring up to 200 feet long)which were floated across the Channel and sunk off the shallow beaches in Normandy. Pontoon floating roadways linked the caissons to the shore. Old warships and merchantmen were sunk around the artificial ports to give protection against the tidal flow.



- Petrol and diesel was to be supplied via a pipeline laid under the channel and known as PLUTO, (Pipe line under the ocean). This was a flexible pipe designed to carry fuel for the tanks and vehicles operating in Normandy. It comprised a 3-inch diameter inner-coated lead conduit protected by seven layers of tape finishing to an external diameter of four and a half inches. It was laid by barge from the Isle of Wight to Port en Bessin.
- Special equipment built around tanks such as flails for detonating mines and machines for infilling anti tank ditches and a host of other sophisticated machines known as "Hobart's Funnies" were available to the Allies but the Americans didn't use them. They proved invaluable to us on the day. Finally troops had to be fully fit and trained to carry out the necessary tasks. If the slightest inkling of these preparations were to reach the Germans they would realise that the first invasion wave in Normandy was the real and only oncoming.

Everyone in England realised the opening of an invasion of Europe would soon take place as preparations were stepped up. My hopes for a commission went out of the window; the opportunity to take part in the coming invasion was too rare an event to miss. If I was good enough and lucky enough it was possible but rare, to be commissioned on the battlefield. When I was at school I believed that men of courage won battle and if you were wounded and possibly won a medal there was something glorious about it all. If you've never served in the armed forces you will not understand how soldiers can feel frustrated if denied the opportunity to get involved in action. After spending weeks of hard training without being able to test one's skill against an enemy it is soul-destroying, we really were eager to go to war. However it applies to both friend and foe alike and hopefully cancels each other out. After the invasion I discovered the truth, war is ugly, cruel and pointless, and being killed in combat is certainly not glorious. But we had to get on with the war anyway. It made me doubt the sentiments expressed in the tale of how Horatio defended the last bridge in Rome against invaders The verse that bothered me is: - " To every man upon this earth, Death comes soon or late, And how can my die better Than facing fearful odds, For the ashes of his fathers And the temples of his Gods? "

About three months before "D day, the commandos and paras scheduled for special operations started a series of dry runs against mock up targets replicating the ones they were to attack after landing in Europe. We had no idea where these targets were, or when the assault would take place, but it was obvious that they were significant and this was not lost on us. We trained hard and long until the tasks became second nature. Landings from assault landing craft were also practised until everything became automatic. By this time I was sure the Germans knew something was brewing but did not, I hoped, know where or when. Eventually we were told it was to be the long awaited invasion of Europe. England was sinking under the masses of men and equipment of all nationalities assembled in closed areas in the south and nobody was allowed in or out. All leave was cancelled and time was passed nursing a beer like a mother with her baby, ultimately we were briefed on our tasks, still with code names for actual locations. This gave rise to many guesses as to where we would eventually end up. A summer date was necessary to provide long enough days, but June was noted for bad weather. The tides, the weather and the phase of the moon fixed the date slot as between the 5th and 7th of June. D Day was scheduled for June 5th but the weather caused it to be delayed for 24 hours. Overlord was to take place on June 6th 1944. Overlord was the land assault and Neptune was the sea borne element. The role of Neptune was to deliver and supply the means for a land war to be waged against German defences and to continue to support and supply after a successful landing. The role of the land forces was to assault designated beaches in Normandy immediately North of the Cotentin estuary and the River Orne, in order to secure a beachhead for further future operations. The landings were to be on 5 beaches named, from east to west, Sword, Juno, Gold, Omaha and Utah. The landings and subsequent breakout from the bridgehead and the campaign in Normandy Holland and Germany saw much fighting by Marines in the 4th Special Service Brigade and the 1st SS Brigade. The actual units were: 4th SS41 CDO. 46, 47 and 48. The 1st SS under Lord Lovatt were mainly army commandos plus 45 RM Commando. Other RM units such as armoured support, gunners and beach units and of course landing craft crews took part. We had been issued with currency, 200 French francs I think, equal to about £1, so we knew there was no going back. We were sealed in camps which were well organised. We were kept occupied with cinema shows, PT, briefings and weapon inspections. There was a lot of rumour and speculation from about June 3rd and moods alternated between

despair and excitement as the grape vine had the invasion on and off. Throughout it all there was a constant wish to get on with it and get up and go. Eventually maps were issued along with special ration packs, seasickness tablets and sick bags. We had a church parade and messages from the Supreme Commander and the C. in C. were read out. Finally, the days, weeks and months were over. Training, briefing and preparations were complete. The actual landing drill in France known, objectives were clear. We were ready to go and make history. I recall someone's advice about German skill with mortars, "beware German mortar fire they can drop one into your back pocket." The cancellation on June 5th was the last straw. Would it ever happen? Then, at last the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force issued a personal message to all about to take part. I can't remember all of it, but the part that stirred me most was, "Soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Allied expeditionary force. You are about to embark upon the great crusade towards which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty loving people everywhere march with you". And so it was victory at all cost and with the clear assurance of ultimate victory, we went to war, young, brash, well trained, but as yet, unbloodied, but keen and most important, British. We were set to open the second front and start the destruction of Hitler's 'Festing Europa'. If we failed, the war was lost. The Allies threw everything into that long day. On that fateful day 2700 ships and 1900 landing craft were employed. We sailed in mother ships and between 6 and 8 miles off the Normandy coast disembarked into LCA's (Landing craft assault) down rope nets and this in rough seas. The area off the coast of Normandy teemed with vessels of every description. The noise was terrific. We learned a hard lesson on that fateful day, namely that things invariably do not go according to plan. Confusion and even chaos are normal. Even before a shot is fired things can and do go wrong. Troops get mixed in embarking into landing craft in rough seas and driving rain; somebody somewhere makes a mistake; radio communication is poor; a vital item of equipment vanishes and last minute alterations to orders don't help. It is a well-known axiom in military circles that says "order, counter- order. DISORDER," which with Murphy's Law says it all. Murphy's law states that if anything can go wrong, it will" Whilst the Royal; Marine Commandos only came into being in 1942/43 following the successful operations of the army ones, they had inherent in their makeup a disciplined affinity with the sea and maritime operations. Apart from the commandos Royal Marines

carried out a variety of operations including the crewing of assault landing craft, manning Centaur tanks (the R.M. Armoured Support Group), providing frog men of the Obstruction Clearance Units, R.M. Gunners on the big ships bombarding the beaches, R.M. Engineers, Beach battalions and of course 41,45,46,47 and 48 R.M. Commandos. Each Commando was divided into troops, sections and sub sections, and comprised between 400 and 500 men. We were in peak condition, eager and ready, so off we went.

The assault was to take place to coincide with the tide on each of the beaches; it had to be deep enough for the landing craft but also not at high tide so that the obstacles would still be visible. Some 150,000 men 12,000 vehicles, 2000 tanks and 10,000 tonnes of stores and equipment were used in the landings. The tides off Normandy run from west to east, resulting in the American landings having to take place before the British ones' so as to keep pace with the tidal flow. The British beaches, Code named Sword, Juno and Gold, ran from near the River Dives close to Caen, westwards via Langrune and St. Aubin sur Mer to Arromanches. Thereafter the American beaches of Omaha and Utah completed the landing plan and were next to the British Gold beach. The crossing was to say the least, uncomfortable, and most people were seasick. The actual landing was made in various types of craft but the assault troops used L.C.A's (landing craft assault), which are flat bottomed, rectangular steel boxes with ramps at the front and three rows of seating lengthways. The middle row invariably got wet. Those in the craft could see absolutely nothing and could only sit and wait as tension grew. The craft were designed to run onto the beach (in theory), drop the ramps and let the troops run ashore dry. In fact mostly the crews were thinking of kedging their craft back into deeper water and dropped their troops in "shallow water" through which they "waded" through bullets and shellfire. Even so the casualties were not as high as allowed for in the planning. Another hazard going in was the steel girders anchored in the seabed and topped with anti personnel and other mines. The state of the rising tide was such that some of these obstacles were hidden and some landing craft were impaled on them and others blown up by mines. In preparation for the landings, allied war ships offshore began bombarding the German defences just before daybreak, concentrating on the coastal batteries covering the beaches and sea approaches. The Allied air forces bombed the inland approaches to the invasion beaches particularly railways and selected bridges. They also

strafed the Pas de Calais area as part of the deception plan. The commandos were suffering from the rough seas and the bad weather. Sea sickness tablets had been issued but with little effect. Given the choice of returning to England or getting immediately ashore in France, the enemy shore became preferable to continued sea sickness. So, wet, bedraggled and feeling sick, only the discipline, training and tradition enabled us to forge ahead to our objectives. Fortunately, once our feet touched dry land, all feelings of seasickness disappeared. All I can remember was running forward amid a violent clamour and noise. Everything was chaotic and only the briefing we had undergone before embarking kept running through my head. I had to get off that beach and reach the rendezvous point as rapidly as possible. The adrenalin coursing round my body lent strength to my limbs, even heavily loaded as I was, running up that beach was easy. I don't recall being afraid at the time, but certainly I was after reaching the rendezvous when I felt sick in my stomach. We were told not to stop for anything including helping the wounded. It was essential to get off the beach and reach the forming up point. Quickly however we got moving again and a peculiar calmness set in. About 6.00 hours, the leading troops in the American sector waded ashore and engaged the enemy. About an hour and a half later we did the same as the tide rose on British beaches. The good humour among the troops was amazing. I remember someone calling out 'when in danger or in doubt, get the bloody brew can out' which raised a hollow laugh. It would be untrue to say we were not afraid, we probably were, but the tasks a head and the long days of training banished fear, and fatalism took over. About three hours after the initial landings more follow up troops came in and impetus was maintained securing a firm beachhead 6 miles deep in places. Between Omaha (USA) and Gold (British) beaches there was an enemy occupied stretch of coast over which 47 RM Commando, reduced to 340 men, carried out a fighting advance of nearly 10 miles through enemy held territory behind the German beach defences to subdue the deep sea harbour of Port en Bessin, essential to the Allies as the terminal for PLUTO and to effect an eventual link up with the Americans. In capturing the port 47 R.M. Commando achieved a daunting task the approach was of nearly 10 miles behind the frontline and through enemy territory. The troops landed on Jig Green beach, which had been secured by 231st brigade off the British 50th Infantry Division and was deserted at the time of 47's landing. Even so there was enemy gunfire and the landing was a bit of a shambles. However they moved to

attack the port from inland rather than a direct sea assault. The port was finally subdued before dawn on June 8th. The landing did not go according to plan and the commando was spread over an area of over a mile but nevertheless all aimed for the RV of Le Hamel church. It was apparent that the town was still in enemy hands so a diversion was decided upon to bypass Le Hamel. That evening a firm base was established on a hill about 2 miles from the objective. Many marines armed themselves with captured German weapons and plenty of ammunition. Supported by naval gunfire from HMS Emerald the port was taken and completed the join up with the V<sup>th</sup> US Corps, and allowed for a continuous stretch of French coastline, nearly 40 kilometres long and 6 miles deep to be firmly in Allied hands. An unknown hazard in Port en Bessin was the presence of two German flak ships in the harbour that had a clear view of the marines attacking the Western feature and could bring devastating fire to bear, forcing the marines to withdraw temporarily. Later the marines engaged the ships with mortars fired from the roofs of the houses. In the east, 48 RM CDO working with the Canadians landed at St. Aubin sur Mer and occupied Langrune after much house to house fighting. The main British landings besieged Caen. The first property liberated on D Day was the café now known as Pegasus Bridge, captured by British glider troops early on the morning of D Day, and prior to the main landings. In command of six platoons of the Oxon Bucks was Major R. J Howard, tasked with capturing and holding the bridges over the River Orne until relieved by commandos. His orders were to seize intact the bridges over the River Orne and the canal at Benouville and Ranville, and to hold them until relieved. The operation was to be a coup de main one and depended on surprise, speed and dash for success, the success of the operation lay in holding the bridges against German counter attacks until relieved. This they did. Landing at the same time paratroops and glider infantry attacked and captured a heavily fortified gun battery at Merville, which commanded the beaches over which the British assault would come and would have had a devastating effect in terms of casualties if not silenced. It was not until 09.20 hours that the 1st Special Service Brigade arrived under Lord Lovat to relieve the troops at Pegasus bridge, having landed at Luc sur Mer, with 45 RM CDO. under command. One hour earlier, units of the 4th Commando Brigade less 45 RM Commando, and comprising 41 and 46 had also landed. The marines played a significant part in the assault phase, and also in the breakout.

Plenty has been written about the breakout and the battle for Normandy, and eventually about the capitulation of Germany so WWII ; COMES WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE PLANNING THAT WENT INTO D Day and SAYS A LITTLE ABOUT the BATTLE FOR Normandy , FRANCE and GERMANY The invasion hinged on 5 salient points

1. The establishment and consolidation of a deep bridgehead along the entire invasion coast within 12 days of June 6th and no later than June 18<sup>th</sup>
2. The capture of Cherbourg by the Americans and its opening up and operation as a supply port, the establishment of PLUTO and the establishment of two Mulberry harbours.
3. An ultimate break out from the American sector by the 25th June (this fortuitously was aided by the continuing siege of Caen).
4. The withdrawal of German forces to the north of the Seine.
5. The early capture of Caen. (Not achieved until nearly a month later than planned) When these had been achieved, the battle for Normandy was nearly at an end and the battle for Germany could begin with " Market Garden, the ill fated attack which was Arnhem, but that is a story in itself - an epic of airborne gallantry.

In the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery at Oosterbeek, Holland are 1700 British, Commonwealth and Polish Airborne troops killed in action over a period of only 10 days between 17th and 26th September 1944. Truly a testament to the gallantry displayed by that isolated and outnumbered force. Due to the total personal command of all German forces by Adolph Hitler, only on his authority could any German troops be moved. The German High Command under Hitler believed, and was encouraged to believe, by the Allies, that the invasion when it came would be directed at the Pas de Calais area. Accordingly the bulk of the German defences were concentrated there, comprising seventeen divisions in well defended concrete bunkers along with Panzer

reserves in the rear close by. The defence of Normandy was not a priority for Hitler and was left initially to the troops garrisoned there. In the British sector the defence of Caen was in the hands of Hitler's personal Guards Regiment, the Leibstandarte, and some fanatical Hitler Youth Divisions. It was 2 weeks after D-day before these were reinforced, and nearly a month after D Day before the veteran Das Reich Division arrived in early July, but even so there were Panzer units in reserve inland, which Hitler would not allow to be moved. In fact it appeared that Hitler was asleep when the initial warnings of Allied landings were taking place and could not be wakened with a request to release the panzers, which remained static to contain the British forces. So you can see that the area around Caen besieged by the British did tie up the bulk of the German armour and allow the Americans to build up their strength and eventually break out of their bridgehead and make for Germany. It was essential to deceive the Germans as to the date and location of the second front if massive casualties were to be avoided. The Allies mounted a deception plan long before D Day, aimed at reinforcing the known German plan, which was to concentrate their main defences facing the shortest channel crossing point, namely the area around Calais. The British deception plan, code named "Fortitude", was to sow in German minds the fact that we had many divisions poised to open up a 2nd front in the Calais area and possibly in Norway. These were non-existent divisions, in a fictitious army, the First U S Army Group, all part of the overall deception plan. We even named the leader of the alleged invasion. It was to be flamboyant American General George S. Patton, well known to the Germans for his exploits in Sicily. The deception also included a fake plan to invade Norway but concentrated on pushing the idea of the Pas de Calais as the main assault area. Patton's phantom army worked so well that Hitler believed for weeks after the Normandy landings that the main invasion was to be at Calais. This fitted in with the German High Command's plan to defend the logical landing area closest to England and encouraged them to continue to build up the defences there and also in Scandinavia.

When it came, the Normandy landing was believed by Hitler to be a feint designed to draw troops from the Pas de Calais area. Deceptive wireless traffic was instituted by a few signallers, in jeeps, dashing all over the South East of England, transmitting, tore in force the idea of massive troop movements, Also dummy staging areas were created,



with blown up rubber tanks and plywood lorries and a few men rushing in and out of buildings and tented camps. Dummy landing craft were openly "hidden" in creeks and harbours. The real invasion force was mobilising in SW. England and the deception "force" was centred in the SE. in and around Kent and in the north of England. All designed to bolster the German belief that the second front was where they believed it would be, in the Pas de Calais and/or Norway. Allied air forces attacked targets between Calais and Le Havre particularly coastal guns and beach defences... the Germans were convinced that it would be Calais. The RAF had a vital role to play in both in the success of the actual landings but also in the deception plan. They had what was referred to as "The Transportation Plan". The geography of France and the design of the rail network in northern France came to the aid of the planners. The rail lines to Normandy branched off the main lines linking the Pas de Calais and Brittany to Paris. Thus by knocking out the rail centres, marshalling yards and repair depots near the Belgian frontier, around Paris and along the Seine would hinder the movement of German troops and supplies to Normandy without significant attacks in Normandy itself. Since the main bomb attacks were not on the proposed invasion area the German High Command would not be wise to Allied intentions and their own belief that the Pas de Calais was the most likely target would be reinforced. As a result many Allied lives were saved on and after D Day. Finally in the dark before dawn on D Day dummy parachutist dolls were dropped north east of Caen and north of Carentan. They were fitted with delay action fireworks, which in the darkness sounded like small arms fire and equipped with sound simulators to create the effect of sub machine gunfire to confirm parachute landings in force and to spread further confusion and alarm among the defenders. This overall deception plan facilitated the establishment of a successful Normandy beachhead, with fewer casualties than would have been the case had the deception failed. If the German high command had not been duped by all these elaborate deception plans they would have been able to oppose the Normandy landings with upwards of an additional half a million men. Instead the German forces were spread between Calais and Norway to counter a perceived threat, which was never to take place. Another significant factor in storming the beaches was the introduction of D.D. tanks which could be launched from ships about 2 miles offshore and with their duplex drive use a propeller in conjunction with a canvas envelope all around the tank and literally swim ashore. The need for tank support

for the infantry was one of the lessons learned at Dunkirk. There were many similar adaptations of tanks to meet anticipated hazards and they were known as Hobart's Funnies after the General who initiated them.

World War 2, known as the Second World War, occurred between 1939 and 1945 and ended with the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan. The war was fought to defeat the military aggression of Nazi Germany and the world ambitions of Japan. It started with the German invasion of Poland and the subsequent declaration of war against Germany by Great Britain. The total dead on the Allied side was 50 million of which 33 million were civilians. On the Axis "German" side, 12 million died, of which 4 million were civilians. Thus approximately 62 million people perished in this war equal to 2.5% of world population. 60% of the casualties were civilians, who died as a result of bombing, genocide, (particularly the Holocaust), and deliberate massacres by both Germans and Russians, sinking of merchant shipping by U Boats, starvation and disease. The war ended with General Alfred Jodl signing the document of unconditional surrender at 2.41 a.m. on the 7th of May 1945 and all fighting ceased at midnight the next day. I was a young man caught up in the maelstrom of war. It gave me a different outlook on life and I believe today I am a different and better person as a result. The war shaped my character and did not do me any lasting harm. I am convinced the discipline and the comradeship are to be treasured. The Marines are a family with generations of father and son following each other into the Corps. They accepted H.O's into that family and I feel part of it. The Marines did a lot for me and I don't regret being a part of them. "Once a marine, always a marine" It would be incomplete in a part historical document like this if some reference wasn't made to those thousands of allied prisoners of war, who languished in German p.o.w. Camps, some for as long as 5 years. Being a prisoner meant undergoing not only deprivation of liberty but also a permanent feeling of abandonment and depression. Some men came to terms with prison camp life and returned home after the war unaffected, others entered into escape plans and found occupation in this. Others were in turmoil for the rest of their lives. It affected men in vastly different ways. To be a prisoner was to be deprived of factual knowledge beyond one's immediate surroundings. Rumour known as the grapevine led to both elation and despair.

There were prisoners who knew nothing about the extent of their camp, for example the detainees in Luft 111, the location of the great escape by tunnel, following which the Gestapo executed 50 recaptured p.o.w.s, didn't even know that their camp comprised 5 compounds and they knew nothing of the great escape until afterwards. For information there were 5 types of camp, the nomenclature of which was: -

Oflag	offzerlager	officers only camp.
Stalag	stammlager	other ranks camp.
Marlag	marinelager	Naval prisoners camp.
Luft	Stalag Luft	Air force prisoner's camp.
Dulag	Durchgangs lager	Reception / transit camp.

I hope this tale, part fact, part historical and part fiction gives an overall picture of the years 1939 to 1945, and ends with the forlorn hope that wars will eventually be no more. I use the word "forlorn" because history teaches us that there have always been wars, but perhaps things will change in the future. Let us hope and pray it will be so.